

Does Every Vote Count?

“Nothing is more unreliable than the populace, nothing more obscure than human intentions, nothing more deceptive than the whole electoral system.” — Marcus Tullius Cicero, Roman statesman

For more than two thousand years, thinkers have argued over whether ordinary citizens can be trusted to choose their leaders. In 1787, the delegates at the Constitutional Convention took up that question when they designed the American presidency. Their debate wasn't simple. Some delegates feared that a direct popular vote would leave voters vulnerable to manipulation, especially in a large country where few people could know the candidates. Others wanted Congress to choose the president, and still others argued that the people themselves should decide. Smaller states worried about being outweighed by larger ones. Southern delegates objected to a popular vote in part because enslaved people, who could not vote, would not count toward their states' influence. The Electoral College emerged as a compromise that addressed these concerns.



Consider how two Founders described the people's role in government:

“I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves. If we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education.” — Thomas Jefferson, letter to William Jarvis, 1820

“Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself.” — John Adams, letter to John Taylor, 1814

The debate continues today. Twice in the past 30 years, in 2000 and 2016, the candidate who won the national popular vote lost the presidency in the Electoral College. Supporters of the current system argue that it protects the role of the states, forces candidates to build support across different regions, and contains disputes within individual states. Critics argue that it makes some votes count more than others and that it focuses campaigns on a small number of swing states. Today, a group of states has joined the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact, an agreement to award their electoral votes to the national popular vote winner once enough states join to reach 270 electoral votes. That question is being decided in state legislatures right now.

Unlike the delegates of 1787, you have access to more than two centuries of election data, along with arguments from both sides. State lawmakers are deciding this question right now. Make the case to one of them: Should the Electoral College or the national popular vote choose the president?

Does Every Vote Count? Rubric

Student Material

	<i>Novice</i>	<i>Apprentice</i>	<i>Practitioner</i>	<i>Expert</i>
Historical Views on the Electoral Process	- defines popular (direct) vote and Electoral College - develops 3–4 research questions about the creation of the Electoral College - notes answers to research questions with information from book and web resources	- describes differences between Electoral College and popular (direct) vote - develops 3–4 research questions that address pro and con arguments for the Electoral College - describes the Constitutional Convention compromise that led to the Electoral College - shares information about elections where there was discrepancy between the popular (direct) and Electoral College vote - questions answered using book and web sources	explains: - history behind argument for popular (direct) vote - history behind argument for Electoral College - relevant claims from delegates at the Constitutional Convention - compromise that led to America’s use of the Electoral College - consequences of compromise to Electoral College - analysis of all historical presidential elections where a discrepancy existed between the Electoral College and popular (direct) vote - utilizes a balance of sources including primary and secondary from book, web, and/or audio format	all of <i>Practitioner</i> plus: includes analysis of quotes and sources from ancient Greece
Data Collection	collects data to show popular vote and Electoral College vote data in presidential elections from the 1800s to present	displays data in chart form to share popular vote and Electoral College vote data in presidential elections from the 1800s to present	culls data from primary sources to illustrate: - percentage of eligible voter turnout for presidential elections from the 1800s to the present - a double bar graph to represent popular vote and Electoral College vote statistics for presidential elections from the 1800s to the present - chart that shares changes in number of Electoral College votes for each state for presidential elections from the 1800s to the present	all of <i>Practitioner</i> plus: includes data from the 1700s and provides a demographic breakdown of statistics for 1976 to present

Data Analysis	reports difference between popular vote and Electoral College vote for presidential elections from the 1800s to the present	reports trends/similarities between popular vote and Electoral College vote for presidential elections from the 1800s to the present	- creates an equation that <i>most closely</i> represents the proportional relationship between the Electoral College and the popular vote for presidential elections - uses data to draw inferences about the population of three different decades within: 1800–1899 1900–1950 1950 to present - approximates the probability of the percentage of future presidents who will win the Electoral College vote but not the popular (direct) vote - creates a digital interactive graphic (infographic) to explain the critical findings	all of <i>Practitioner</i> plus: - predicts future trends of popular vote and Electoral College vote - takes a representative survey of a particular demographic to determine how much support people have for the Electoral College versus popular vote for presidential elections
Argument Content	- written to a national leader - states position supporting a specific presidential election model - supports claim with facts and statistics from books, web, and/or periodicals - statistics, examples and/or anecdotes from research support claim - has an opening and closing	- written to a national leader - states position supporting a specific presidential election model - supports claim with facts and statistics from primary and secondary sources - employs a compelling opening - closing inspires the reader to action - includes statistics, definitions, examples, and anecdotes that directly support claim	- written to a national leader directly charged with amending Article II of the Constitution - provides position supporting a specific presidential election model - expands on claim with supports from primary sources including statistics, news reports, essays, laws, court cases, and/or digital media - supporting paragraphs address potential counterclaims - makes recommendations for future presidential elections - describes the consequences of the argument - employs a compelling opening that sets foundation for claim - closing inspires the reader to action	all of <i>Practitioner</i> plus: - employs justification from social media, literature, or film - includes a position on the use of social media and/or the internet on voting - includes a critique of ancient philosophies regarding elections - opening and closing connect to create a cohesive whole

Argument Craft	• graphic organizer is used to plan position essay • paragraphs begin with a topic sentence that includes a transitional word • paragraphs are written with simple, compound, and compound-complex sentences • a thesaurus is used to find alternatives for overused words • spelling, capitalization, and end punctuation rules are followed • sources are cited	• graphic organizer is used to plan the introduction, body, and conclusion of position essay • paragraphs begin with an idea-based topic sentence and include transitional words • paragraphs are written with varied sentence structure and include transitional words to connect ideas • sophisticated vocabulary is used to hook the reader • spelling, capitalization, and punctuation rules are followed • sources are appropriately cited at the end of the proposal	• draft of essay shows clear connections to pre-writing organizer • paragraphs begin with an idea-based topic sentence • paragraphs include varied sentence structure • sophisticated vocabulary is used to hook reader • rhetorical devices add tone and voice to the position through the use of: ○ idiom ○ allusion ○ simile ○ metaphor • transitional words are included in appositive and/or subordinate clauses • transitional phrases and clauses link ideas within and between paragraphs • follows spelling, grammar, and syntax rules • sources are appropriately cited within and at the end of the proposal	all of <i>Practitioner</i> plus: • utilizes extended metaphor in position essay • includes nonfiction text supports to deepen reader's understanding of claim • hyperlinks to virtual source(s) • shows evidence of revision process
----------------	--	---	---	---